

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Barney Bernard Wilson,)	C/A No. 0:15-2105-TLW-PJG
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)	
Andrews Police Department; Georgetown County Detention Center,)	
)	
Defendants.)	
)	

The plaintiff, Barney Bernard Wilson, a self-represented pretrial detainee, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) (D.S.C.). Plaintiff is a detainee at the Williamsburg County Detention Center, and files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915. Having reviewed the Complaint in accordance with applicable law, the court concludes that it should be summarily dismissed.

I. Factual and Procedural Background

Plaintiff complains that he was transferred from the Georgetown County Detention Center to the Williamsburg County Detention Center for no reason. (ECF No. 1 at 3.) Plaintiff asserts that his transfer did not follow “proper procedure” and resulted from the unprofessional “personal feelings” of an unidentified individual. (*Id.*) Plaintiff claims that the transfer could have placed him in “harms way.” (*Id.*) Plaintiff seeks monetary damages and injunctive relief.¹ (ECF No. 1 at 4.)

¹ To the extent Plaintiff seeks release from confinement, such relief is not available under § 1983. See Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 500 (1973) (holding that habeas corpus is the exclusive remedy for a prisoner who challenges the fact or duration of his confinement and seeks immediate or speedier release).

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

The Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted,” “is frivolous or malicious,” or “seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). A finding of frivolousness can be made where the complaint “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” Denton, 504 U.S. at 31. Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. Neitzke, 490 U.S. 319; Allison v. Kyle, 66 F.3d 71 (5th Cir. 1995).

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* complaints. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). Such *pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *id.*; Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of

a potentially meritorious case. Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980); Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. Erickson, 551 U.S. at 93 (citing Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-56 (2007)).

Nonetheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677-78 (2009) (outlining pleading requirements under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for "all civil actions"). The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so; however, a district court may not rewrite a complaint to include claims that were never presented, Barnett v. Hargett, 174 F.3d 1128 (10th Cir. 1999), construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him, Small v. Endicott, 998 F.2d 411 (7th Cir. 1993), or "conjure up questions never squarely presented" to the court, Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985).

B. Analysis

The Complaint is filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which " 'is not itself a source of substantive rights,' but merely provides 'a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere conferred.' " Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994) (quoting Baker v. McCollan, 443 U.S. 137, 144 n.3 (1979)). A legal action under § 1983 allows "a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief." City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd., 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege:

(1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

1. Andrews Police Department

The United States Supreme Court has held that a municipality or other local governmental entity may be liable under § 1983 for the violation of a plaintiff's constitutional rights "only where the constitutionally offensive acts of city employees are taken in furtherance of some municipal 'policy or custom.' " Milligan v. City of Newport News, 743 F.2d 227, 229 (4th Cir. 1984) (quoting Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978); see also Bd. of Cnty. Comm'rs v. Brown, 520 U.S. 397, 403 (1997); Walker v. Prince George's Cnty., 575 F.3d 426, 431 (4th Cir. 2009). Thus, a plaintiff who seeks to assert a § 1983 claim against a municipality for acts done by a municipal official or employee is obliged to identify a municipal policy or custom that caused the plaintiff's injury. However, the instant Complaint fails to allege that the actions of which Plaintiff complains were done in furtherance of any policy, custom, or practice of the Andrews Police Department. Rather, Plaintiff appears to allege that this defendant's procedures for transport or transfer were not followed. (ECF No. 1 at 3.)

Further, to the extent the Complaint attributes the alleged wrongful actions of unidentified employees to this defendant, "municipalities are not liable pursuant to *respondeat superior* principles for all constitutional violations of their employees simply because of the employment relationship." Edwards v. City of Goldsboro, 178 F.3d 231, 244 (4th Cir. 1999) (citing Monell, 436 U.S. at 692-94). Moreover, a municipality may not be held liable under § 1983 solely because it employs the tortfeasor. Bd. of Cnty. Comm'rs, 520 U.S. at 403. As Plaintiff has alleged no actionable

conduct by the Andrews Police Department, this defendant is entitled to summary dismissal from this case.

2. Georgetown County Detention Center

It is well settled that only “persons” may act under color of state law; therefore, a defendant in a § 1983 action must qualify as a “person.” See 42 U.S.C. § 1983; Monell, 436 U.S. at 690 n.55. However, courts have held that inanimate objects such as buildings, facilities, and grounds are not “persons” and do not act under color of state law. See Nelson v. Lexington Cnty. Det. Ctr., C/A No. 8:10-2988-JMC, 2011 WL 2066551, at *1 (D.S.C. May 26, 2011) (finding that the plaintiff failed to establish that the Lexington County Detention Center, “as a building and not a person, is amenable to suit under § 1983”); see also Brooks v. Pembroke City Jail, 722 F. Supp. 1294, 1301 (E.D.N.C. 1989) (“Claims under § 1983 are directed at ‘persons’ and the jail is not a person amenable to suit.”). As the Georgetown County Detention Center is a building which houses detainees and other inmates awaiting state court proceedings, it does not constitute a “person” amenable to suit under § 1983. Therefore, this defendant is also entitled to summary dismissal.

3. Insufficient Factual Allegations

While the court must liberally construe a *pro se* complaint, the United States Supreme Court has made clear that a plaintiff must do more than make conclusory statements to state a claim. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) (providing that a complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.”). Instead, the plaintiff must plead “factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678.

In this case, Plaintiff asserts that he was transported to the Williamsburg County Detention center “for no reason,” and that the proper procedure for transport was not followed. (ECF No. 1 at 3.) However, to the extent Plaintiff may be attempting to allege a violation of his right to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment, he provides insufficient factual allegations to state a plausible claim. See Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007) (holding that a plaintiff must provide sufficient factual allegations to “nudge[e] [the] claims across the line from conceivable to plausible”). Accordingly, the Complaint is also subject to summary dismissal for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii).

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the Complaint be summarily dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.


Paige J. Gossett
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

May 29, 2015
Columbia, South Carolina

*The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”*

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’ ” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).